

# YouTube, Copyright, and Demonetization: An In-Depth Collection and Analysis of YouTube's Content Management Policies

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## Abstract

YouTube's content management policies are systemically flawed. The site's copyright enforcement and demonetization practices are nearly incomprehensible to their creators, and even more so to their average user. YouTube's faulty and exploited copyright and demonetization systems often result in false claims and strikes, leaving creators vulnerable to harassment, loss of income, and channel termination—effectively leaving them unemployed. Through the analysis of multiple cross-genre case studies, this paper illustrates how opaque policies and inconsistent policy enforcement disproportionately harm independent content creators who rely on the platform as a livelihood. As YouTube becomes a dominant source of news for younger audiences, the company's practices raise serious ethical and political concerns regarding censorship, corporate accountability, and the integrity of online journalism. This paper collects information about YouTube's content management policies and synthesizes it into a comprehensible summary. Afterwards, the implications for digital journalism and freedom of expression are discussed with the overarching message that reform and meaningful legal protections are necessary in the immediate future.

**Keywords:** Journalism, YouTube, Enforcement

## Introduction

Mark Fischbach, more widely known as [Markiplier](#), was the original voice of copyright abuse on YouTube. His video titled “YouTube Just Gave Me a Strike...” ([Markiplier 2020, 00:00](#)) was the first time a mainstream YouTuber brought the topic to public attention. In 2020, the platform had a community-wide uproar over the rapidly developing crisis involving false copyright strikes, where creators would receive a strike without being told how they violated intellectual property. It has now been 5 years since the then 2 billion—now 2.74 billion—users first protested the problem with YouTube ([Business of Apps 2025](#)).

In addition, copyright exploitation is not the only problem creators have been forced to grit their teeth and bear. Demonetization has been an issue ever since the first “Adpocalypse” (a term coined by the then most-subscribed channel on YouTube, Pewdiepie ([Pewdiepie 2017, 00:22](#))) in 2017, triggered by YouTube's very sudden and abrupt focus on family-friendly content. The term describes a period of time where ad revenue is drastically reduced for creators due to a contentious event on the platform.

Several new versions of the terms of service, new content filters, and a new CEO later, and neither problem has been fixed. In fact, YouTube as a whole has maintained an unfair power imbalance regarding what content is allowed on the platform. To this day creators have to act as whistleblowers to call out unjustified content limitations ([LegalEagle 2025](#)) in order to inform their community on current enforcement practices on the site. As younger generations are viewing YouTube as a primary source of news, ethical concerns about how messaging is prioritized on YouTube are at the forefront of modern political discussions ([Galan et al. 2019](#)).

This paper will give a comprehensive explanation of how copyright and demonetization are used by YouTube as a corporation and community, since the information is largely obfuscated and inaccessible to the average user, and continue with an examination of the political impact media censorship on YouTube has.

## YouTube's Connection to Politics

Twenty-six percent of adults in America reported that they get news from YouTube, and 72% of those said it was an important or the most important way

they received news in 2020 ([Atske et al. 2024](#)). As such, it is unsurprising that politics is an integral part of YouTube’s ecosystem. Youtubers like [Philip DeFranco](#) (6.6+ million subscribers) and [Blair White](#) (1.5+ million subscribers) dominate the platform with wide-reaching videos on all sides of any political debate. Even YouTubers who are not inherently political, like the [VlogBrothers](#) (Hank Green and John Green, 3.9+ million subscribers), will dip their toes into political content when they feel it is acceptable and relevant to their viewer base ([see vlogbrothers 2025, 00:00](#)).

Even when an individual video is not explicitly political, political values will still trickle in through implicit biases during the creation process. In many ways, a YouTube channel is a self-contained newsroom, circulating stories and propelling values, whether they intend to or not, the same way journalism is viewed through a political lens, whether the content has a political drive or not ([Riedl & Eberl 2020](#)). This drives the initial number of adults consuming news on YouTube as an important source drastically higher than the study would suggest, since many of the people consuming news on YouTube are not doing so intentionally—but are consuming as a byproduct of entertainment.

Most of the following discussion will highlight commentary YouTubers as they fit this box the most clearly.

### Copyright

According to Google’s—YouTube’s parent company ([La Monica 2006](#))—official support page, copyright is given “when a person creates an original work that is fixed in a physical medium” ([Google Support 2025i](#)). The creator does not have to do anything to gain this right; by virtue of creating the work, they have the ability to claim that someone else has violated their copyright and have a video either demonetized or taken down.

There are multiple ways to fill out a copyright complaint of some kind, but most do not result in a copyright strike. Instead, the video receives a copyright claim. The simplest way is through Content ID. According to Google, “a Content ID claim is automatically generated when an uploaded video matches another video (or segment of a video) in YouTube’s Content ID system” ([Google Support 2025d](#)). YouTube’s Content ID system is made up of audio and visual files uploaded to the database by their copyright holders. Once someone has put their work into YouTube’s Content ID system and it matches with a video, the

outcome is typically demonetization. This style of claim is often referred to as a “strike” in older videos where the actual verbiage was obscured by YouTube in older, more opaque versions of the terms and services ([YouTube 2007](#)). The community now understands that the Content ID method only files copyright claims (Content ID), leading to demonetization or blocking the video from being viewed ([Google Support 2025d](#)).

The title of demonetization is slightly misleading as this version is entirely different to the kind of demonetization mentioned in this article’s title. In a Content ID case, the video is not deprived of ad placements like one would expect—instead, the money made from the ads running on the video is given to the claim holder. For example, a video with music in the background may be Content IDed by the rights holder even if the work is transformative, which then removes all revenue the creator would have received ([see Pyrocynical 2019, 00:29](#)). The YouTuber is able to appeal this decision, and theoretically, someone from YouTube will review the video by hand (if requested) to find where the video is allegedly violating copyright laws.

However, it is rarer to hear of the problem getting fixed than it is for the YouTuber to have to take down the video entirely. While there are no clear numbers on how many false copyright claims are amended, Adam Johnston from [YourMovieSucks](#) is one example of many who could not get the problem resolved across multiple videos ([YMS 2022b](#); [YMS 2022a](#); [YMS 2024a](#); [YMS 2024b](#); [YMS 2025](#)).

YouTube’s “copyright match tool” is the second option for copyright holders to take action with. Anyone with “a demonstrated history of successful Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) takedowns” ([Google Support 2025h](#)) is eligible to be a part of the program. Instead of offering a choice between a takedown request and demonetization like in a Content ID claim, you have three options. You can file a takedown request, message the creator personally and ask for the content to be changed, or archive the match and do nothing. The tool is meant to scan for full reuploads of videos, so it is used significantly less due to the fact that it does not typically detect throwaway gags or content being used as references, as those instances do not take up the majority of a video. The copyright match tool method does not lead to a true copyright strike and can only lead to a claim being filed ([Google Support 2025h](#)).

The final method is the most aggressive to a channel.

Getting “DMCA’d” has become a colloquial shorthand for when someone is being maliciously attacked by someone whom they made a video about. While technically speaking, all three methods use DMCA takedowns, getting “DMCA’d” specifically refers to when someone files a legal DMCA takedown request through YouTube’s webform ([Google Support 2025f](#)). The DMCA method is the only method that can lead to a formal copyright strike. It is also the only method that is available to all users on the platform, leading to ethical and economic concerns for content creators.

YouTube follows a three-strikes rule; if a channel receives three copyright strikes in a 90-day period, that channel is banned ([DMCA.com 2021](#)) and cannot exist on the platform. Gaining a strike on your channel previously put your channel in “bad standing” ([Google Support 2015](#)), meaning certain channel features were removed as punishment. Historically, the two most egregious punishments associated with a strike were the ability to stream being removed for 90 days (if the strike was on a live stream) and the ability to monetize any content being removed for 90 days (if the strike was on a video) ([Google Support 2015a](#)). In the current terms and conditions, consequences are looser and slightly less fatal. In the case of streaming, the 90-day ban has been reduced to a week ([Google Support 2025c](#)). Automatically receiving a ban on all monetization after receiving a strike has also ended, but it is still an action that YouTube can manually choose to take ([Google Support 2015b](#)). Each strike expires after 90 days, at which point the consequences (if any still apply) will be lifted from the channel.

### **Consequences to Strikes and Claims**

Channels that receive a copyright strike are said to be largely removed from YouTube’s algorithm during the stint of their strike. There is no official record of this being a part of YouTube’s policy, but “shadow banning” (i.e., when a platform refuses to suggest your content to viewers because of controversial content ([penguinz0 2022, 00:52](#))) is hardly a new concept. It is of the utmost importance to understand that YouTube and Google are not transparent about the aforementioned rules and regulations. Beyond extreme obfuscation, they are often entirely impossible to get a hold of for further elaboration; YouTube representatives do not reliably respond ([Markplier 2020, 11:12](#)) to any of the people using their platform, whether they have 10 subscribers or 100 million, and largely rely on creators to sift through the terms and conditions for all of their

information—which in many instances does not exist.

### **Copyright Abuse and Legality**

Knowing that copyright is, at its core, a legal concept that YouTube is, perhaps dramatically, attempting to abide by, may beg the question as to whether there is a legal way to fight false claims and strikes. The answer is a tentative yes, followed by a much harsher no. You can sue someone for maliciously filing false copyright strikes on your videos under 17 USC 506(c) ([17 U.S. Code § 506c](#)), which states a claimant can be fined up to \$2,500 for every false claim they file. But a precedent confirming this law has never been set.

While expensive, legal action is always available to a YouTuber on paper. Sometimes, a false striker will promise legal action unless they are paid for the content being used or unless the video they take issue with is deleted. Many YouTubers ([Dodgson 2020](#)) have promised to counter sue if a false striker threatens a copyright infringement lawsuit, but only one lawsuit has ever come close to being fully seen through under 506(c).

YouTube Vs Christopher L. Brady was filed by YouTube in 2019. The defendant, Christopher L. Brady (username cbrady350), was accused of and proven to have falsely filed takedown requests under 15 fake identities ([YouTube, LLC vs Brady 2019](#)). His main targets were three Minecraft YouTubers, “Kenzo,” “ObbyRaidz,” and “Cxlvxn.” Each creator received two false strikes at the same time filed by Brady, followed by a private message asking for money in order to get the strikes removed. If they refused, he would send the third strike and have their channels deleted. The case settled outside of court before anything substantial came of it. Brady paid YouTube \$25,000 dollars ([YouTube, LLC vs Brady 2019](#)), which was supposedly then donated to charities supporting digital creators. No money was awarded to the original three victims to compensate for the time and labor lost, whether that be via the legal system, independent reimbursement from Brady, or from YouTube itself.

Thus, it is nearly impossible to sue for false copyright strikes. YouTube is the only entity to have seriously attempted to take action because it was the only entity affected that could afford the excessive legal fees and the extended timeline of a major court case. A YouTuber’s most precious resource is time, because it is also their biggest enemy.

Until late 2019, the YouTube algorithm heavily prioritized upload consistency ([Rieder et al. 2018](#)).

A YouTuber who uploads weekly could not afford to waste a month of their lives on a lawsuit for a little over two thousand dollars maximum. The algorithm would stop suggesting their content, and their growth would stagnate. They would be unable to make any money while pursuing the case, rendering the lawsuit unattainable and irrational. This put digital journalists in a precarious spot, and to some extent, it still does. They have to cater to both the algorithm and the people they are criticizing in the first place if they want their content to be seen widely

Today, YouTube not only considers consistency as its primary analytic ([Creator Insider 2025, 04:00](#)), but that does not mean the problem is fixed. Many modern YouTubers (see [Quinton Reviews](#)) spend months working full-time on multiple hour-long videos. Each day they spend working on them means a day longer they push back their next paycheck. A month of time wasted is a month of time they are not working on the next multi-million-view hit.

Copyright claim/strike abuse is still only half of the puzzle when it comes to maintaining journalistic integrity on YouTube. Traditional demonetization is equally troubling, if not more so.

### **Monetization**

To find what qualifies for demonetization, it is important to understand what qualifies a channel to be monetized to begin with. Any channel can sign up to be part of YouTube's Partner program, granting them the ability to make an AdSense account and run ads on their videos. 55% of the profit generated from videos that run ads goes to the creator ([Google Support 2025j](#)), while the rest is Google's profit.

The amount of revenue generated from one ad is largely up for debate as it depends on time of year, kind of video, kind of product, kind of ad, and much more ([Google Support 2025j](#)). The biggest factor is whether your audience watches the ads fully through and whether they click on them. The latter has the most drastic impact on how much money creators make and is wholly up to the relevance of the ads you get. While AdSense can be unpredictable, for many YouTubers, this ad revenue is what allows them to justify making content.

### **Demonetization**

Contrary to a copyright claim or strike, demonetization occurs when YouTube itself flags content as "inappropriate." Inappropriate means a wide

swath of unknown requirements. Well-known examples in the public sphere are extreme profanity or vulgarity, gore, and/or sexual content. What is considered moderate versus extreme is up to YouTube's internal discretion and is largely guessed on when creators make content. Demonetization removes all ads from running on a YouTube video and thus takes away the opportunity for ad revenue to be made from the affected video (see Figure 1).

In other words, content that YouTube does not want to be associated with advertisers on YouTube is demonetized. There is no other official way for creators to make money from content itself, although they can make money on their channel as a whole through stream donations and paid subscriptions to a channel; generally, neither avenue is very popular.

For YouTube, both as a company and as a community, sponsors are more important than anything else on the platform. Without them, the platform simply is not viable as nearly all of YouTube's revenue comes from advertising ([Ceci 2025](#)), to the point that there are no released figures for revenue made through other streams like channel membership. The following is a brief explanation of what will remove ads from a video on YouTube.

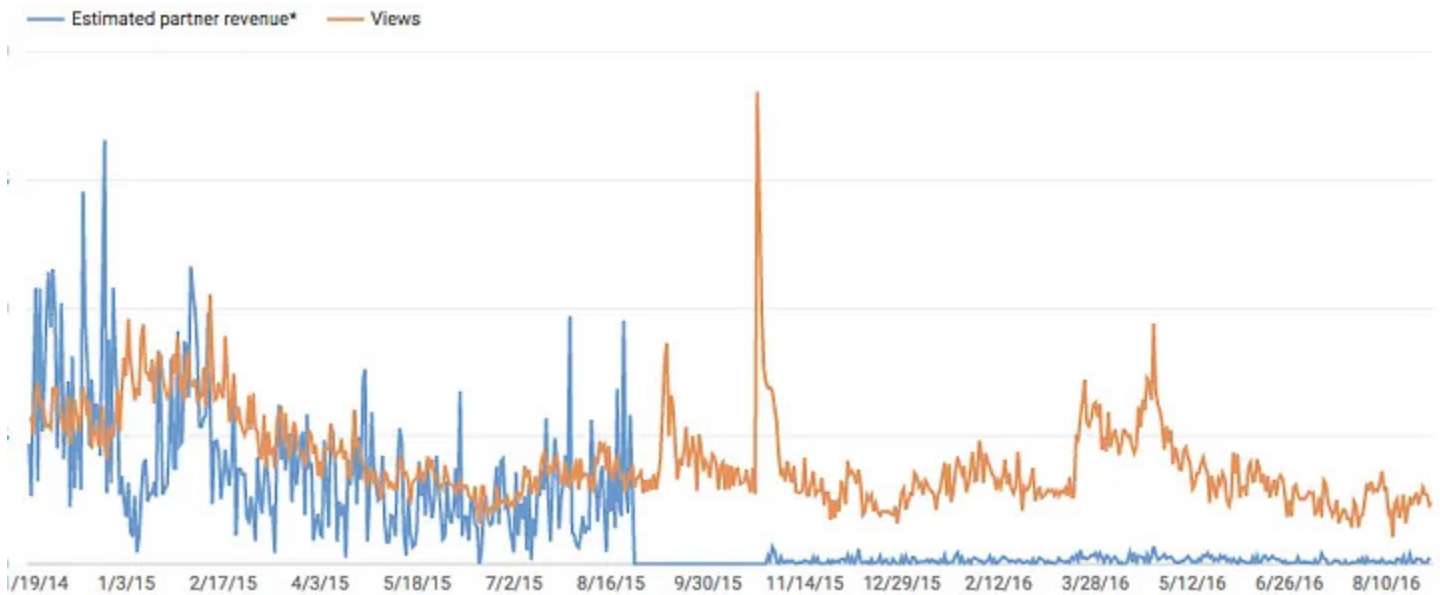
### **Specifications to Demonetization**

Officially, according to YouTube, videos will be demonetized if they have:

- Inappropriate language
- Violence
- Adult content
- Shocking content
- Harmful acts and unreliable content
- Hateful or derogatory content
- Recreational drugs or drug-related content
- Firearm-related content
- Controversial issues
- Sensitive events
- Enabling dishonest behavior
- Inappropriate content for kids and families
- Incendiary or demeaning content
- Tobacco-related content ([Google Support 2025a](#))

However, videos won't always be demonetized for having these things. For example, artistic content has the privilege of being exempt at YouTube's discretion, as well as content meant to educate. Monetized music videos with explicit drug use and sexual content exist due to this stipulation.

**Figure 1**



The photo shows the ad revenue made from a video posted in late 2014 versus the revenue made after getting demonetized in late 2015. The blue line shows revenue, and the orange shows the view count ([Medium 2018](#)).

While some of those rules have minor clarification ([Google Support 2025b](#)), most remain overly simplified and vague. What counts as a “sensitive event”? How much inappropriate content can you use and still have it count as “occasional”? How can you determine which kinds of video game violence count as demonetizable? There are no publicly available answers; in fact, there’s not even a privately-available answer, as YouTube is largely unaware of how each individual branch of the platform judges things ([Markiplier 2020, 10:39](#)). For example, the sales team would not know what the product team is doing, who would not know what the management team is doing. The very few creators who have access to YouTube representatives aren’t able to ask them for more specific details because no one knows. Not even an official representative has the resources to ask how demonetization is judged.

When discussing his own experience trying to gain clarity on demonetization practices, Markiplier was quoted to say the following:

There are people at YouTube that do genuinely care and my contact Meg has always been a champion for me. ... But Meg still has to fight and the fact that she or anyone else at YouTube has to fight for me shows that there’s a problem inside YouTube. Who are they fighting? Who’s butting up against who? If the rules are even, why does there need to be a fight in the first place? ([Markiplier 2020, 10:39](#)).

More recently, YouTube’s hypocrisy regarding

demonetization came to a head in December of 2022, where suddenly entire channel catalogs would be demonetized en masse due to yet another update to what was deemed “advertiser-friendly.” The update required absolutely zero swearing in the first 8 seconds ([Penguinz0 2022, 00:59](#)) and treated all swearing equally.

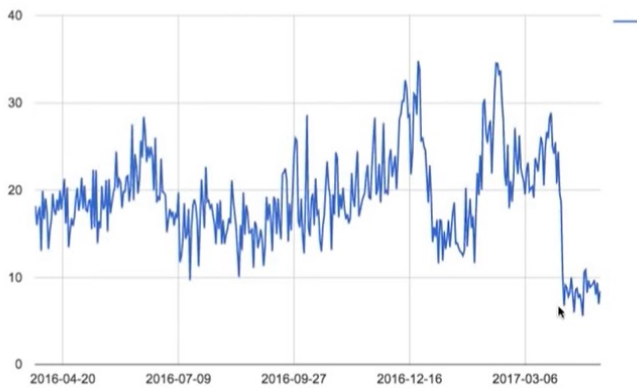
While this crisis was happening, YouTube still monetized channels that exploited showing breastfeeding content on their channels by using the educational content loophole ([Nerd City 2017, 02:50](#)). These channels were not moms who just so happened to be caring for their children. User Sexy Spiritual Tasha Mama was the worst offender, being accused of incestuous ([Nerd City 2017, 00:00](#)) or otherwise inappropriate actions ([PewDiePie 2016, 00:00](#)) within her videos, including her young children. Tasha later admitted to having had sex while breastfeeding one of her babies ([Harrison 2017](#)). Her content, like all other channels within the genre, focused on her naked breasts while she nursed children. Her channel was deleted ([Nerd City 2017](#)) after months of educational exemption exploitation.

### **Effects of the Adpocalypse (Mass Demonetization)**

To contextualize how extreme demonetization and sponsorship removal was during the first and second Adpocalypse, Figure 2 has been provided, which shows a decrease from ~29% ad placement to ~7% at

the start of March and stayed low well into April of 2017. While the community agrees that there have been four Adpocalypses total (See ([Fandom 2017](#))), the community widely considers the first two to be the main justification for YouTube demonetizing content so aggressively.

**Figure 2**



*The photo depicts a graph of the ad placement rate—the percent of viewers that receive an ad when watching your video—according to Hank Green from his gaming channel, GamesWithHank, during the first Adpocalypse in 2016 - 2017 ([GamesWithHank 2017, 00:00](#)).*

The first occurred in early 2017. Antisemitism, hate speech, and police brutality, were all posted about or mocked by big names like [PewDiePie](#) and Kendall Jenner and caused large groups of organizations, including Dr Pepper, Johnson and Johnson, and the UK government to pull their advertising from the site ([Fischer and Vavra 2017](#)). The result was rapid changes to the recommendation algorithm to focus on family-friendly content, though this was never formally admitted by the company.

The next Adpocalypse was in early November 2017, due to [Logan Paul](#)'s Aokigahara (known colloquially as the "suicide forest") video ([Logan Paul 2017, 00:00](#)), in which the ex-Nickelodeon star showed a dead body hanging from a tree while vlogging in Japan. While this in itself is inappropriate, the YouTube algorithm placed the video at the top of its trending page completely unrestricted, which allowed kids, parents, and new users to be steered directly into viewing a corpse. Perhaps unsurprisingly, advertisers did not like the negative publicity and especially did not like the idea of their ads being placed over a video of a suicide victim. Logan's video caused YouTube to completely redo its

monetization policies once more while they appealed to the sponsors that left.

### **Societal Impacts Caused by Mismanagement of Advertisement Placement**

When YouTubers do not know how to keep their earnings, they start sacrificing aspects of their content in order to keep that needed income. As Figure 1 shows, demonetized videos truly do not make any meaningful amount of money. Creators typically sacrifice cursing first. While it may be a small loss to some, for many, cursing is a part of their brand, which is hacked off to maintain wages. Topics are chosen more carefully; for example, fewer gamers may play the new Resident Evil game due to "excessive violence." Fewer people make videos on shocking historic events or refuse to touch on true crime.

This is when YouTube starts to effectively kill the journalistic freedom of its creators. Creators can't say what they want to say, show what they need to show, or create what they need them to create at their fullest potential. They are fundamentally having their craft restricted. But what happens if, after those sacrifices, they still get demonetized? A limit on creativity becomes red tape on journalism.

With no money from their craft, how is someone expected to produce content? These people are not formally considered journalists; they do not have a company to rely on when the views get low or the paycheck gets thin (and previous attempts at company-oriented channels have ended poorly, (see Defy Media, ([Peterson 2018](#))). A modern generation of journalists are threatened by poor policies and even poorer legal practices.

These are hundreds of YouTube reporters that bring news, or meaningful critiques of recent news, to wide swaths of the world's youth. A few of the most popular are [Penguinz0](#), [YourMovieSucks](#) (YMS), [Coffeezilla](#), [friendlyjordies](#), and [Vince Vintage](#). Each content creator reached peak viewership of over 4 million people, and many have videos with viewer counts far greater. They will be used as case studies to represent what thousands of creators go through while attempting to upload to YouTube.

Penguinz0's video showing characters acting like they had road rage was demonetized and later fully deleted due to "violating community guidelines" ([penguinz0 2020, 00:00](#)) with no further elaboration. YMS has a long history of dealing with false copyright strikes ([YMS 2015, 00:00](#)) (mainly involving CoolCat

Figure 3

The screenshot shows a dark-themed form with three tabs: 'Requirements' (checked), 'Contact info' (active), and 'Rationale'. Below the tabs, a message states: 'The following information will allow YouTube and the claimant to contact you, or an authorized representative, regarding your request. [Learn more](#)'. The form contains several input fields, all marked as required:

- Full legal name (required) [?]
- Street address (required)
- Phone (required) [?]
- City (required)
- Email (required)
- State or province (required)
- Zip code (required)
- Country (Select)

*The photo shows the information required by YouTube in order to file a counter takedown request when a false copyright strike is filed. This information will then be given to the striker. Taken from Vince’s video going over the situation ([Vince Vintage 2023, 07:02](#)).*

Saves The Kids) and demonetization for showing snippets of the movies he reviews and criticizes. Coffeezilla has faced copyright claims and strikes from many people he has investigated over the years – more often than not involving cryptocurrency scammers or their associates ([Coffeezilla 2019, 00:00](#)). Friendlyjordies faces any of the above hurdles often at once as he exposes corrupt Australian politicians ([CBS News 2022](#)). Finally, Vince Vintage recently faced one of the biggest false copyright attacks in modern YouTube history.

In order to paint the clearest picture of how unprotected YouTubers are even after the issues and controversies discussed, we will be looking at Vince’s case in particular depth. While doing research on government hackers for a video, Vince came across a man named Sanadodeh Nesheiwat and privately messaged him, asking for an interview ([Vince Vintage 2023, 01:55](#)). Nesheiwat had pleaded guilty to and was later convicted of conspiracy to commit fraud, which involved gaining access to multiple military networks. The hacker had historically agreed to interviews with public shows like The Darknet Diaries podcast ([Vince Vintage 2023, 01:49](#)), though he decided to reject Vince’s request. Later on, he sent unnerving messages telling the YouTuber that the video the interview would have been for actually shouldn’t be posted at all ([Vince Vintage 2023, 02:17](#)).

After the video was posted, Vince received message after message, daily and often hourly from Nesheiwat, threatening him for posting the video followed by a slew of false copyright strikes from suspicious names and email addresses ([Vince Vintage 2023, 05:10](#)). He then hired a copyright attorney in order to convince YouTube that the strikes were fake—or if nothing else, not being filed by the supposed “Adam Chester” that was allegedly accusing Vince of copyright infringement.

A second lawyer was hired not long after in order to appeal these legal take-down requests through YouTube’s system. YouTube requires that you give the accusing party your legal name, address, phone number, and email, as shown in Figure 3.

The purpose is so that if the accusing party does decide to go through with a lawsuit, they know who to serve it to. For Vince, this information would undoubtedly be used to dox him (when someone posts identifiable information like home address or legal name). And when YouTube refused to do anything about the false claims—false claims that Vince couldn’t ignore or else YouTube would delete his channel—he had no choice but to provide the convicted government hacker his exact location.

By the end of the altercation (see [Vince Vintage 2023, 00:00](#)), Vince had hired a private investigator, a cyber harassment litigation firm, and a copyright attorney. He and his girlfriend also were forced to move

out of their home, not just in order to ensure the safety of themselves and their loved ones, but also to protect his livelihood, entirely because of the information YouTube forced him to hand over to a known criminal. Threats to his channel were ignored, as well as threats to his life and those of his family ([Vince Vintage 2023, 01:16](#)).

### Political and Journalistic Importance

The discussed YouTubers' videos have reached people in ways traditional media simply is not able to anymore, yet no one has taken action to amend the fact that every avenue YouTubers have to bring news to the public is attacked by either the people they report on or the platform they post on itself. There is no rational way to appeal these decisions. There is no realistic lawsuit to file, and unfair or uneven demonetization is non-negotiable with the website.

If YouTube, a company with 2.74 billion active users and \$29 billion in revenue annually ([Business of Apps 2025](#)), is allowed to watch its creators be censored and bullied by not just other third-party offenders but its own moderation team, then who can the public hold accountable to protect these journalists? It's known, as shown by Vince Vintage, that YouTubers who report on the stories that are interesting and important to the public will be unfairly prosecuted by those who have committed the crimes they are reporting on. But YouTube doesn't protect creators against that. YouTube is also incentivized to be as clean as possible in order to be safe for advertisers, which means all of the solo content creators reporting on child sex trafficking, the war crimes in Ukraine, the tragedies of cyberbullying, and any exploitation involving music or a music producer of any kind will easily (and emphatically) be punished and stamped out.

Figure 4



Broadcast Yourself™

*The original logo used for the YouTube homepage showing the slogan used by the site on and off until 2019 ([YouTube 2006](#)).*

Creators, who have no motive other than to create and educate, creators, who are for some people, the only eyes to the problems around us, are blinded at the hands of a company whose slogan is “broadcast yourself.” ([YouTube 2006](#)) Or at least it used to be, as in a thematically on-the-nose move, the company quietly removed the slogan from their blog in 2019... just months before the outrage in 2020, as seen in Figure 4.

### Conclusion

The only proven way to make progress is to hold YouTube accountable. YouTube has only ever changed because people banded together on Twitter, Instagram, and Twitch to tell them that they were wrong. That their users weren't doing anything until creators got their videos back, their channels back, and their livelihoods back. Until there are actual protections for digital journalists, the responsibility of protecting the exchange of information online has been put brutally on the backs of users.

Media censorship such as this is often used with the excuse of keeping the peace, while “the underlying motive is to prevent the public from knowing information that may threaten the authorities.” (Abbas et al. 2020). When taken to this degree, it is a nearly undebated, direct violation of democracy when viewed from the perspective of unfavorable topics or concerning viewpoints (at the discretion of a higher power that be) being banned and punished. As presented to the United Nations 50th Human Rights Council, the failure to protect journalists on or offline is “rooted in a lack of political will” ([Khan 2022](#)). It is not a private affair, nor should it be a public responsibility.

YouTube's content management policies are a complicated set of treacherous and ineffective means of trying to preserve monetization. The youngest generations of our society are using YouTube as a means of political reference far more often than traditional news ([Galan et al. 2019](#)). YouTube holds the power to sway content suggestions in any direction they like, as well as having policies that allow for the immediate silencing of any creator with a minority viewpoint. A more widespread discussion of the ethical and political concerns regarding YouTube's effect on modern journalism is necessary.

### Methods

The case studies selected for this review were chosen based on which examples were relevant at the time of the incident (depending on the era of YouTube

being discussed) and forthcoming with information on how their copyright strike, copyright claim, or demonetization occurred. As YouTube itself does not make this information public, the examination of any given event relies on the scope of context provided by the YouTuber unless there were legal documents to supplement the discussion. Given these criteria, most of the YouTubers discussed were commentary YouTubers as they were naturally more likely to report on their issues

### **Limitations**

The research findings discussed in this paper are limited in two ways: in the scope of media types discussed and the ways in which censorship has been enforced. The commentary on how unethical demonetization and copyright enforcement affect digital journalism is pertinent to all types of media that are published independently online under a revenue-sharing platform (a platform that allows any creator to publish content and distributes a portion of the funds they raise back to them ([YouTube Team 2007](#))). Which is to say, the general theme of maximizing profitable content will carry from platform to platform, even if it's in different forms or enforcement policies. However, it will not equally represent platforms like Nebula and Skillshare who operate as an application-based platform (a platform that invites only specific creators onto their site for a limited scope of content), and therefore, bring creators on with a specific goal in mind rather than working only as a moderator. It also may not equally apply to platforms that have little to no moderation (4chan ([Kulkarn 2024](#)), Gab, BitChute ([Buckley 2022](#))), where biases may be formed via the culture of the site rather than an inherent goal to control the content being published.

The specific critiques pertaining to demonetization and copyright enforcement are significantly more narrow in their application, as all case studies presented are from Youtube and take the form of audiovisual media. While some platforms serve similar audiences to YouTube (Twitch with streaming and TikTok with image-based content being prime examples), very few exclusively prioritize audiovisual media and therefore practice different demonetization and copyright policies, which may cater to different biases. The cultures and trends unique to different platforms will also affect what an abuse of power looks like. The Adpocalypse is an inherently negative topic on YouTube, but it would not set off the same internal flags if it were posted on a

different site like Reddit because that company did not experience that particular wave of backlash.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that due to the nature of heavy-handed censorship, it is likely that many points of evidence have been lost to time due to victims' videos, community tab posts, X (formerly Twitter) threads, and other social media postings getting deleted or removed. During particularly bad examples, evidence that could have been used to explain a creator's situation may never have been posted at all, depending on the speed at which they were banned or the limitations on their channel at the time of the incident. The historical and current scope of the issue cannot truly be known due to these factors.

Future research may be able to solve some of the mystery surrounding copyright and demonetization enforcement via uploading videos with slightly altered visuals, scripts, and watch time in order to pinpoint what features the YouTube algorithm specifically targets at any given time. This research would have to be meticulously documented to ensure that readers could track when the findings became out of date as the algorithm shifts rapidly. However, any research at all may provide a window into the inner workings of YouTube's system, which would be a much-needed point of clarity for creators.

### **Biographical Note**

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